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NEWS RELEASE

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Overcoming Stigma Keeps Children in Their Communities

A sense of shame often keeps families and children with mental health disorders from seeking help in their communities, preventing families from getting the help they need. But a family in north Idaho knows firsthand that community-based support can help them overcome the stigma of mental illness.

Seth is a north Idaho teenager with a serious emotional disturbance. His behavior resulted in intervention by law enforcement and the courts, and Seth was sent to a detention center. When it was time for Seth to leave the detention center, a group home appeared to be his only option. But thanks to the Kellogg Children's Mental Health Council, Seth is now thriving at home and in his community.

In Idaho, approximately 18,000 children have a serious emotional disturbance. Stigma keeps many parents of these children from seeking help. Local and regional mental health councils, like the one which helped Seth, are trying to change that.

In Seth's case, his probation officer referred him to the Kellogg Mental Health Council. After listening to Seth's mom, the council came up with a community-based solution: someone to provide in-home care for Seth, as well as therapy for the entire family. The cost for this community-based solution was approximately \$3,000 for three months. A group home setting would have cost five times that amount, over \$16,000.

Seth has progressed beyond in-home treatment. He is enrolled in a public school, as opposed to an off-site, one-on-one setting. Relationships with his father, mother and siblings have improved. Most importantly, Seth no longer is perceived as a threat to his family or his community.

Children with mental health disorders are best served by their parents working with a community-based network of services and supports. Stigma often keeps families and children with mental health disorders from seeking help in their communities. For many families, the stigma of having a child with a serious emotional disturbance can be a mark of shame. Families and children are more likely to receive help when we take the perception of shame out of mental health disorders.

Regional and local mental health councils are a vital part of our systems of care in Idaho. A system of care is a circle of schools, advocacy organizations, public and private agencies working together to assure that the needs of families and children are met. Councils listen to the needs of families and empower them to make decisions. Councils also coordinate community-based services and supports, and reduce the negative impact of mental health disorders on families. The councils' strengths are in their community collaboration.

Families can contact their local Health and Welfare office, or the state office at (208) 334-5689 for more information about councils in their area.

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(Editors: Interviews are available upon request. Contact Chandra Story at 208-334-6681 for more information.)